

Speech by Mr Ari Koponen Chair of the Finnish IPU Group at the 153rd IPU Assembly in Arusha, Tanzania, at the General debate on the topic:

Enhancing Good Governance and Empowering Communities Through Inclusivity, Trust and Opportunities for All

Distinguished Speakers, Honourable Members of Parliament, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to address this conference on a topic that lies at the heart of sustainable development and democratic resilience: **enhancing good governance and empowering communities through inclusivity, trust, and opportunities for all.**

In a world marked by geopolitical tensions, technological change, demographic shifts, and social polarization, the strength of our societies depends fundamentally on the relationship between citizens and the state. Good governance flourishes where people trust institutions, where everyone has a voice, and where opportunities are available to all.

From Finland's perspective, trust is perhaps our most valuable national asset. It is earned through transparency, accountability, equality before the law, and reliable public services. When institutions act fairly and effectively, citizens are more willing to participate in society and support democratic decision-making.

Over decades, Finland has built strong public institutions based on the rule of law, openness, and low levels of corruption. Citizens have access to public information, independent courts, and effective oversight mechanisms. This has created a virtuous cycle in which trust reinforces strong institutions, and strong institutions reinforce trust.

But trust alone is not enough. To build resilient societies, governance must also be inclusive. Every individual should feel that they belong and have the opportunity to shape their future.

Finland's education system provides a good example. We view quality education as a fundamental right. Every child, regardless of family income or place of residence, has access to publicly funded education, including free school meals. Education remains one of our most effective tools for reducing inequality and creating opportunities.

Inclusivity also requires gender equality. Finland was the first country in the world to grant women full political rights. Today, women play leading roles across politics, business, academia, and civil society. Our experience shows that societies thrive when everyone can contribute their talents.

Empowering communities means bringing decision-making closer to citizens. Local governments in Finland enjoy substantial autonomy and play a central role in delivering

services. Local participation remains a cornerstone of governance, strengthened by the fact that around 85 percent of Finnish Members of Parliament also serve on municipal councils.

Digitalization has further expanded opportunities for participation. Finland has invested heavily in secure and accessible digital public services. At the same time, we recognize that technology must bridge divides rather than widen them. Digital literacy, accessibility, and secure digital identities therefore remain priorities.

Good governance also requires resilience. Finland's approach is based on cooperation among government, businesses, civil society, and citizens. This whole-of-society model recognizes that preparedness, security, and social cohesion are shared responsibilities.

Good governance is not only a domestic issue. Respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, democracy, and the rule of law must also guide relations between nations. For this reason, Finland condemns Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine.

Russia's actions have caused immense human suffering and represent a serious violation of international law. Finland stands firmly with Ukraine and remains committed to supporting its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The lessons of this war reinforce the importance of trusted institutions, democratic governance, resilient communities, and a rules-based international order.

Equally important is the role of civil society. Volunteers, non-governmental organizations, youth groups, and local associations strengthen social bonds, encourage participation, and ensure that diverse voices are heard.

At the international level, we can learn much from one another. While every country faces different challenges, people everywhere seek fairness, security, dignity, and opportunity. They want institutions that listen, leaders who are accountable, and communities where everyone feels included.

As parliamentarians and public leaders, we are custodians of democratic institutions and public trust. Our task is not only to govern effectively today, but also to strengthen the foundations on which future generations will build. This means investing in education, defending the rule of law, promoting inclusion, and ensuring that the benefits of innovation are shared widely.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Prosperity, stability, and social cohesion do not emerge by chance. They are built through a long-term commitment to fairness, transparency, participation, and equal opportunity.

Let us work together to ensure that every person, in every community, has the opportunity to contribute, participate, and succeed.

Thank you.